

10-1-2012

Crosscurrents: Fall 2012

Associated Students of the University of Puget Sound

Follow this and additional works at: <http://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/crosscurrentsgallery>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Associated Students of the University of Puget Sound, "Crosscurrents: Fall 2012" (2012). *Crosscurrents*. Book 2.
<http://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/crosscurrentsgallery/2>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at Sound Ideas. It has been accepted for inclusion in Crosscurrents by an authorized administrator of Sound Ideas. For more information, please contact soundideas@pugetsound.edu.

Crosscurrents

SPRING 2012

Crosscurrents Volume 54, Issue I
Associated Students of the University of Puget Sound
[HTTP://CROSSTHECURRENT.TUMBLR.COM](http://CROSSTHECURRENT.TUMBLR.COM)
Contact: ccr@pugetsound.edu

Crosscurrents would like to thank Holly Senn, the professors who donated their time to review our Select Works, the English Department, the Art Department, the Humanities Program, Collins Memorial Library and the Office of Admissions for making this issue possible, and Photo Services for helping out with our Art Photoshoot.

Printed and bound in Kent, Washington at Digital Print Services on FSC Certified 100% post-consumer recycled paper.



Set in Adobe Garamond Pro.

Crosscurrents

Staff

Editor in Chief – Emma Wilson

Content Director – Ursula Beck

Layout Director – Aidan Meacham

Marketing Director – Theresa Gabrielli

Art Editor – Erin Wheary

Poetry Editor – Jessica Obert

Prose Editor – Maya Auguston

Faculty Advisor – Bill Kupinse

Editorial Staff

Perry Buto

Jasmyne Casey

Jordan Cox

Yuri Kahan

Symantha Lee-Harkins

Haley Schmidt

Devon Hally

Marissa Litak

Maia Raeder

editor's note



steel wool / abbie baldwin

We live in a world of dichotomies, and in few other times have those dichotomies seemed so evident. While in the nation at large, political divisions ran deeply, in our submissions, different distinctions came to light: between the pastoral and the industrial, the mirthful and the melancholy, the direct and the complex.

As the name suggests, Crosscurrents seeks to find the point of convergence in the midst of such multiplicity. The most turbulent water can be found in the midst of a crosscurrent, and it is my hope, and the hope of the Crosscurrents staff, to challenge our readers to see and re-see the dichotomies present in our lives and in our community, for it is only in examining our differences that we come to find confluence.

Emma Wilson

guest contributor
Holly Senn

Holly A. Senn is known for her botanically inspired sculptures and installations created from discarded library books. In these labor-intensive works she explores the life cycle of ideas – how ideas are generated, dispersed, referenced or forgotten. Senn has exhibited in venues including the Brooklyn Public Library in New York, 23 Sandy Gallery in Portland, Center on Contemporary Art in Seattle, and spaces in Tacoma including Spaceworks Tacoma, Tacoma Contemporary's Woolworth Windows, Fulcrum Gallery, Kittredge Gallery, and Collins Memorial Library. Awards include the Grant for Artists Projects (GAP) from Artist Trust and a Tacoma Artists Initiative Program (TAIP) grant from the Tacoma Arts Commission. Born in California, Senn graduated from the University of California, Berkeley (M.L.I.S) and Mills College (B.A.). She works as a librarian at Pacific Lutheran University. Since 2001 she has lived and worked in Tacoma, Washington.

all photo credits: Duncan Price



"Bur" / 2008 (8"x15"x8")



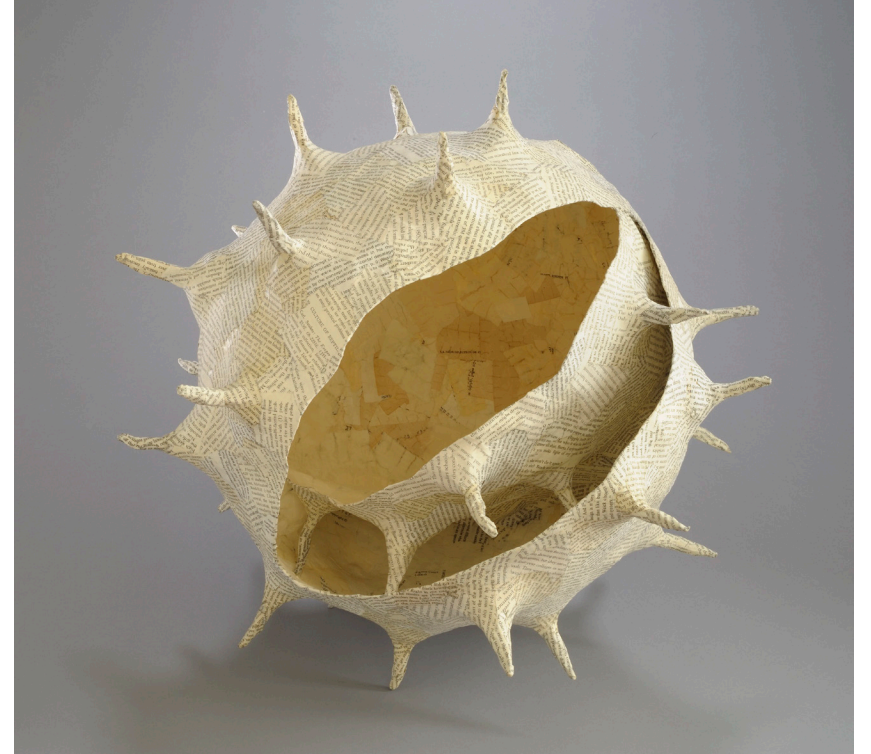
"Enchanted Forest of the Mind" / 2006 (9'x25'x21')



"Husk" / 2008 (22"x11"x11")



"Nest 3" / 2012 (14"x11"x11")



"Spore" / 2011 (22"x22"x22")

interview with holly senn

What drew you to creating art out of discarded books?

My art investigations are intertwined with my part-time “day job” as a virtual reference librarian at a university library. An underlying tension in my work is that the discipline and practice of librarianship, from which I draw upon, is often romantically imagined to be aligned with print while contemporary library practice is driven by patron desire for digital access to resources. As I cut, rip, soak, align, realign and glue, I reflect on each new generations’ collective erasure of some element of the past and its casting of new ideas into the future. My work is as ephemeral and fleeting as ideas committed to paper.

How does living in the northwest inspire the work that you do?

Trees, pulp and paper have had a prominent role in the evolution of the Northwest’s identity, waterfronts, ecologies, industries and people. The imagery and materials of this region have inspired my art making for a decade. Living in Tacoma, I’ve also been inspired by the many working artists here, as well as exhibitions at Tacoma’s four museums.

Where does your interest in creating botanical sculptures stem from?

Because I look at gain and loss, remembrance and lapses, permanence and impermanence, images of trees, plants and other organisms that have visible regeneration cycles inspire my art practice.

What is the connection between the natural forms that you create and the man made/processed medium that you use?

In my work I seek to evoke life cycles and blur the line between the intellectual and natural world. The printed book has been a recognizable symbol of recorded and shared information for centuries. In transforming discarded library books and their pages into new forms, I use these iconic materials to consider the cyclical and recursive nature of ideas.

What might you say to inspire young creators?

Look for ways to find synergy between your daily life and your art explorations – this will expand your creative thinking and help you define priorities. I found that by combining my work life and my art investigations, I not only increased the amount of time I spent thinking about art (what I was going to make, how I was going to make it, where I was going to show it), but I got traction with my art career (landing exhibition opportunities, press coverage, and sales). The more time I spend on the enterprise of art – creating, engaging the work of other artists, promoting my work – the happier I am.

table of contents

Guest Contributor: Holly Senn

Steel Wool / abbie baldwin / editor's note

My Love Affair with the Northwest / anna elliott / 1

Untitled / Craig Cowden / 3

Salmon and the Heart / david mucklow / 4

Untitled / bianca jarvis / 5

Sung Poem / emma kranz / 6

Leaf with Drops / paul goudarzi-fry / 8

And Then It Hit Me / auna lundberg / 9

Trace / nicole de biasi / 10

City on the Edge / kc paulsen / 12

Goodbye is a Heavy Word / rowan carrick / 13

Burban / allen ward / 14

The Architecture / natasha breidenbach / 15

Dishes / ursula beck / 16

Spoon / connor jones / 17

Psalm / ashley goff / 18

Catholic Confession / gabrielle kasindi / 19

Reading the Last Page First / marissa litak / 20

The Fed / adam krauland / 21

Hurry / sikander sohail / 22

Select Works

Jigsaw / martine kivatinetz / 25

Reviewed by Hans Ostrom

Untitled / ben sample / 28

Reviewed by Elise Richman

The Shape of Things / krista silva / 31

Reviewed by Suzanne Warren

Painting the Carpet / daniel smith / 34

Utility / rachel mcfarland / 53

Light / henry babbitt-cook / 54

Smoky Visions of Goodbye / perry buto / 55

Thread / meg anderson / 58

Untitled / joseph ward / 59

This is a Title / aiden hercules / 60

Untitled / erin fremder / 61

Stockholm Syndrome / ava williams / 62

Woodfire Vase / jonathan steele / 63

Explosive Mind / cleo maul / 64

A Hinged Heart / marissa litak / 65

Sisters / erin wheary / 69

It Pours. / rowan carrick / 70

Untitled / symantha lee-harkins / 72

Crabapple Pie / casey oakes / 73

Symptom / annie thomas / 74

Untitled / david oksner / 76

Testimony / jordan cox / 77

4 / yuri kahan / 79

Wrong Place at the Wrong Time / renee meschi / 80

Breaching / allie jones / 82

Untitled / valentine hoy / 83

my love affair with the northwest

anna elliot

It's cold here. Not uncomfortably so, just cold enough to need a light jacket and still feel the stiff breeze against your neck. The breeze is not just cold air blown at you. It has a life, a personality. It rises up out of the cold waters of the ocean, runs down through the Sound, brushing its back against the tall pines. It lingers in the mountains, becoming mature. It lazes in the sun and chases shooting stars at night. It makes its way between the trees, along the mountain passes, it follows train lines and catches itself between bus wheels. It strides through the pools of water in the gutter on the street, pushes up against people's legs and rises up to brush its fingers on the back of your neck.

Here, the air is not just air. Sea salt mingles with cigarette smoke. Pine needles release their intoxicating scent and the spring rain picks it up. The rain makes the smell something tangible. It hits the surface of your skin and diffuses across. Once under your skin, it becomes a part of you. The rain, the pine, the salt, the cigarettes – they combine with mud and coffee and rust and smoke from ships. They seep into your pores and claim you as their own.

The landscape will make its mark on you. The first signs will be in the color of your skin. As the sun hides away behind the mountains and sinks behind grey clouds, the pallor of your skin will come to match that of the sky so that its grey white tones are reflected in your flesh. The skin of your hands will become like the bark of the trees. As you grip stones to hike higher, hold fast to the

straps of your pack as the rain and wind beat against your back, and work until your bones feel like claws scuttling endlessly across the sea floor, the skin on your palms and fingers will assume the likeness of the bark on the pines. Tough and cracked are the lines of northwesterners' hands, knotted and rough like the trees weathering every storm. The rain and wind will everyday play with your hair until it becomes wild and free. As wind, rain, clouds, and sun drive the endless cycle of the years, the cut of the mountains will slowly press their outline into your face. Their crags will become your crows' feet, their arc your smile lines, their summit etched into your forehead. You will become a product of the landscape, made beautiful by your likeness to it.

Here, there is a music to life. The rain thudding against your windowpane becomes the baseline. The branches of the trees rubbing on one another in the wind, a fiddle dancing up and down to notes. Trucks and buses roll down the wet street echoing their low bass notes as horns make their insistent cry, mixing with them. The wind acts as conductor in the orchestra of the forest, calling up the leaves to tremble like fingers on a harp, going through the moss, signaling it to rub against the bark like a bow on the strings of a cello and motioning to the brush to raise up their voices in chorus. The wet from the rain gives everything a soulful sound. The howl from the horn of a far-off train comes to your ear as a line from a long-sung blues. But the song is not a purely sorrowful one, although any song of life, a true one, must deal in its inevitability. The song embodies the majesty of the ocean, the patience of the mountains, the stature of the trees, and the playfulness of the wind. It sings of the cleansing of the rain, and the mystery of the fog. It is the voice of generations making their northwestern fate.

When children in the northwest cry, their tears are made of rain and sea salt.



untitled / craig cowden

salmon and the heart

david mucklow

Fly line loops,
and runs through guides
as it delicately drops
a heavy chartreuse fly
upon the ruffle,
letting it float downriver.

King salmon thrash
on the surface
as they spawn;
the fisherman's face
is drained white and cold.

With each strikeless drift
his chest sinks deeper
as he casts the line out again and again.
Yet no fish strikes as he strips
the bright fly back to him.

Splash after splash,
cast after cast
he drips more of his blood
into the river,
as salmon gnaw
at his heart.



untitled / bianca jarvis

sung poem

emma kranz

River rocks
Slender smooth bamboo stalks
Late night talks
Breathing space of astronauts
Sleeping futons napping cots
Patch of carpet lying down
So this town
Green grey brown
Summertime in lost and found
Left to chance
A fancy way
To dance away
And if to stay
To lose my monkey crown

Punching bag
Bruises on a long leg
The rights to brag
Push it until it breaks
All the life and love it takes
To sow this plant and make it grow
Organically just watch it flow

The leaves and buds but soon you'll know
That this sprout will soon come out
Of the stuffing stop and shout
Spring has come and so

Bu gunes
Startling this feeling fresh
Yavas ates
Experiment this burning test
Skin hangs waiting for a rest
From questioning this pokey chest
Wouldn't say it's cursed or blessed
A time that's lost a head that's messed
Chloroform
A heady storm
Ring a bell and back to normal
Hic bunu olacagiz

Sultanim
Ogrenmegim lazim
In Kasim
Look back and forth and feel numb
Polish that hitchhiker's thumb
Potential gunman looking tired
Hidden eyes and words inspired
Blank application now you're hired
The sound that's gold
Will still get old
Breathing space just flannel fold
Stories lingering untold
Aclik never fed



and then it hit me

auna lundberg

I'm lost. In this depth of rain. Sitting patiently till the world falls together. Who even knows where the mind really wonders as water falls. The ideas sail far away to a different place, somewhere, where we aren't surrounded by those who are directly near us. It's an odd feeling, this hopelessness. This desire to be where we are not. But the thoughts always come, it is only when we succumb to them that we realize how much we don't want to be who we are when we are. Forget the small talk and impressions let out the chaos and stare at the rain. Follow it to the end and find what you truly want. That quiet spot in a book or a laughter filled room with a love. Nothing will prepare you for when that moment strikes. It happens all the time. How strange it really seems?

trace

nicole de biasi

Trace the dawn across my eyes.
flame and golden starlight,
dry the riverbed.

Drowning in the dappled depths
of winter morning light.
Choke on every breath like smoke;
consumed in unabated silence.

And if only I,
only I could,
if only I had
a moment to spare,
a memory to share.

Catatonic earth, creep into these bones.
trace the years across the stones,
my lonesome hieroglyphs.

Crying to the cold,
the whitewash world.

and if only,
only you could
trace the dawn into my heart.
Breath of life,
if only you'd come.

Starlight, find me a fire.



goodbye is a heavy word

rowan carrick

You came to my funeral in a dream. You brought me dandelions and said, “I hope you don’t mind that they’re weeds; they’ve still got so much beauty.” You closed your eyes and kissed my cold lips and your tears dripped down to your shoes, and as they did they began to water the dandelions, and the dandelions bloomed.

Then you became a sparrow and flew into my window; you were a wounded bird and I was just a little girl. And when I picked you up you were the world, and you began to turn, but you got too heavy and I dropped you. I was five years old and I cried and cried. And you broke into hundreds of pieces and one went into my eye. It wasn’t sharp, but it got stuck there, like a piece of lint or dust you just can’t seem to find. And you sat there, underneath my eyelid for the rest of my life.

And when I tried to say goodbye to you,
All I could think of was the way those dandelions bloomed.



the architecture

natasha breidenbach

I don't know how long
they've looked like this but,
as I sit at the dining room table,
I notice that

my grandpa's hands,
on close inspection,
could be Machu Picchu,
Dresden, Detroit.
They are farmer hands.

They are colossal,
unbreakable remains.

After breakfast,
standing in the kitchen,
my grandma shows me
the new barn swallows
building the annual nest
over her porch.

She tells me, as she does
every year, that
she and my grandpa
don't have the heart
to knock it down.

dishes

ursula beck

A simple rhythm of water and hands,
moving matters through and through, soap
suds, bubbles, seeping 'long sides and rims.

Quiet pittering patter of thoughts, standing up,
sitting down, vying for the mind turning, to awaken
a rush of fear or joy, hinged on their style of speaking.

A back and forth—wet and dry—fingers
and sponge, noticing grime, firmly, gently,
removing traces of meals left behind.

The terms on which our lives are defined, masking
surfaces, luminously nodding, truth. Planes
smoothed clear, the curving pull of sponges close.

An intimate knowledge of tines and bowls,
depths and angles distorted. Stale remnants of
conversation, the loom of memory, roast lamb stew,

gathered up and washed along. Momentarily
maintained for use. The balance of matters lost, matters
gained. A faith uncertain, found in the sweep of hands
and soap, invariably life washing along.



spoon / connor jones



catholic confession

gabrielle kasindi

I grew up Episcopalian –
basically Diet Catholic,
so I never was forced to go to confession
before today.

I didn't think I'd be face-to-face
with Father Deeves.

Don't you usually get to hide
your shamed face
from the priest?

Apparently, not in Catholic school.
Deeves is staring me down
just like every nun
on my way in here.

He knows
They know;

My eyes are as red as the devil
I reek of skunk
and I stumbled in third to last.

Father, forgive me;
I've never been to confession,
and I came to my first session stoned.

psalm / ashley goff

reading the last page first

marissa litak

Neon signs glow in the
grimy window. Dirt is
time and time is dirt.
The bare lightbulb shines
on my memory, and I
wish for more than this
instant.

Are the gazelle and
the lion so different from
the daisy and the child?
My wick is black and curled,
my wax runs from me with
centipede legs. Spent, my coinage
worn thin and without worth,
I dim.
Rest.



the fed / adam krauland

hurry

sikander sohail

Your eyes are always at your destination
long before your legs catch up.
They wait there for you
as mine take in their impatience with
your form.
I'd be warm and charming and
tell you that you're pretty today
if today meant a damn to you
ma'am, can I just
cram a word in the
jamb of the door, don't
slam it before I can
clam up and pour out
the way I adore your
rocketship core
seven six five and four
get your fix in three more -

As you soar with a roar I don't
mind you
ignoring me.
Snatch up your morning tea.
Pivot and let me see
where your eyes dart to,
the moment your heart knew
your legs kept you here
in one place
for too
long.

select works

poetry

jigsaw //

martine kivatinetz

art

untitled //

ben sample

prose

the shape of things //

krista silva

Selected for their strength as works of art, both in workmanship and insight, the following pieces are explored by Puget Sound faculty to exhibit their depth and recognize their achievement.

jigsaw
martine kivatinetz

We glued the world back together
one peninsula at a time
once the days grew longer
and time ceased to mean that
we were late for something better.

You told me you liked the feel of Africa
with all its bumps and jagged edges
and suddenly I felt jealous

So I painted a jungle into Canada
because I know you like sloths
and I wanted to keep you close

But though time had abandoned us
after a series of harangues,
you began to feel restless
and longed to trace the rounded tip
where the Atlantic met the Indian.

So I chopped off my hair
and stopped shaving my legs

in hopes that maybe I could be jagged
enough for you to stay

But you fled for Ghana anyway
and now no seconds pass
but still I paint jungles to fill the time
until you come back
and we can continue our puzzle
right where we left off.

poetry review

professor hans ostrom

The poem “Jigsaw” will appeal to readers partly because it is both whimsical and serious. Its ironic, urbane, and mildly enervated tone recalls the rhetoric of the New York “school” of poets, especially Kenneth Koch. At the same time, its main conceit of representing a relationship as a puzzle calls to mind many traditions of extended metaphors and evokes the complexity of contemporary romance. More than a few readers will also notice a hint of the imperial or colonial point of view toward the world, the globe, continents, and especially Africa. This muted but palpable point of view only adds to the complexity of the relationship evoked by the poem, a relationship in which the personal is not just political but geo-political and in which the map of the world becomes a site of personal negotiation.

art review

professor elise richman



Lines connect as they traverse space; they direct the eye while traveling from one point to another. A line can represent a short path or imply an infinite trajectory. Ben Sample's sculpture acts as a meditation on line. His simple, open, wooden cube provides a framework for the exploration of physical, optical, and conceptual dimensions that can inform the passage from point A to point B.

Sample's manipulation of humble materials, rubber bands, 1 x 2 inch pine boards, and screws, embodies a static model of a dynamic state of tension. This tension is actual and concrete; the evenly spaced rubber bands are so taut they appear to be on the verge of snapping. A conceptual tension is also at play in Sample's measured organization of elastic lines. Sample's cube alludes to mathematic, theoretical absolutes while its everyday materials and his simple, transparent process call attention to its constructed nature.

The visual organization of line in Sample's sculpture reflects broader ideas about the nature of and limitations of order. He is part of a longstanding tradition; artists have created two and three-dimensional models of linear order for centuries. One of the most influential, in terms of Western art, examples of line-based order began with the invention of linear perspective during the Renaissance.

At the time of its inception, the depiction of linear perspective represented far more than the illusion of space; such lines delineated philosophical as well as optical perspectives. In Renaissance paintings perspectival lines project into a space from a single perspective, thereby

placing the individual at the center of the universe. This singular perspective, grounded in perceptual laws, in part visualizes individual free will.

Linear perspective marked a departure from the multi-directional nature of medieval imagery. In terms of compositional order, pre-Renaissance paintings' lack of a single perspective represents an entirely different world-view; humankind appears subject to the unpredictable vagaries of fate in contrast to Renaissance perspective's representations of a world directed by human reason and free will.

While the representational nature of Renaissance and medieval art combine images and compositional devices to tell stories about the human condition, Sample's abstract sculpture is devoid of narrative. Abstract art like Sample's often grapples with and represents the very ordering mechanisms, perceptual laws, and material processes that are subsumed in and underlie representational art.

Sample's rubber band lines, stretched across a rigid though warped cube, call attention to their physicality. Moreover, his sculpture invokes the infallible, cerebral realm of Euclidean coordinates and analytic geometry while paradoxically foregrounding the imperfection and labor embodied in human constructions. Material and theoretical issues are simultaneously physically embodied and conceptually represented by the taut rubber lines that reach across a modest wooden frame that can't quite contain them.

the shape of things

krista silva

We are the children of the latter half of the 1980s, arriving on the cusp of innovation. In our brief lives we spent tireless afternoons turning the dials on our old panel televisions, languishing during commercial breaks perceived eternal. We used to sing hymns until Google replaced god as the all-knowing force to whom we shouted our tireless pleas. Equally, these things made us slaves. We grew awkwardly into our bodies, debating over conflicting sexual instruction. Does it mean nothing or everything? I still don't know the answer. These thoughts and questions seldom seemed important in the aftermath of Jonesboro and Columbine. Overstimulated by the burgeoning dominance of round-the-clock news coverage, we developed PTSD miles away. I lost count of all the times I'd crumpled and folded at the sound of closing locker doors or a tardy student running down the hall. We pieced ourselves together as best we could and moved through the days with hearts half full. Or were they half empty? The sun began to rise and fall completely unnoticed. In autumn the leaves fell completely colorless, but they popped as bright as shooting stars against the rising smoke, dust, and debris that hung over New York City. I remember that moment so distinctly. The television suspended in the corner of our math class, demanding our attention. We saw the second crash, but we didn't understand the shape of it; the weight of it. The fear

was palpable as our caretakers sold their freedom for a reassurance that never came. We held our breath, running from the shadows of airplanes and carried the images with us like a souvenir; a box of puzzle pieces only time could help us decipher. It always seems like there's just one still missing. We held the weight of the world on our shoulders as our own small lives became punctuated with heartache, illness, death, and despair. We stood silently screaming as our brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, and neighbors marched into a war we're still fighting, and no one can agree on why. None of them survived. Even when they did come back, they really didn't. But we went on, treating each symptom the same as the last. We embraced apathy, callousness, and sarcasm. These were easy masks to wear to cover up the helplessness that seemed to follow us everywhere. We tried to love, but everything we learned came from movies and television. We had no idea how it felt. We entered into relationships with a growing checklist of expectations and false ideas, and yet we were surprised with the inevitable result of separation. We healed our fractured egos with a delusory consolation, telling ourselves that the latest object of our affection just wasn't the one. We grew up wrapped in blankets woven out of fear. We were taught only to distrust, because prevention is the best medicine. Our mothers were replaced by televisions, and our fathers, the internet. We never learned to feel or touch. We never learned to love. We lost ourselves in dreams, preferring to live life detached. And now... we have inherited all of the broken pieces of this world. Our parents and politicians wonder why we are so dispassioned, preferring to label us as disrespectful, lazy, or entitled. We wonder how they could forgive the way these things have shaped us or whether or not they even noticed.

prose review

professor suzanne warren

"The Shape of Things" is a manifesto in a matchbox. A mere 562 words long, this incendiary short piece is a collective portrait of "the children of the latter half of the 1980s." The first-person plural narrator guides us through the events and cultural phenomena that have shaped her generation: Columbine, 9/11, and the Iraq War, as well as movies, television, Google, and CNN. The tone is impassioned and righteous, a *j'accuse* for millennials. "We wonder how they could forgive the way these things have shaped us," says the narrator of her elders. As she catalogues twenty years' worth of manmade disasters, she notes that these public tragedies have sown private sorrows, too: "We were taught only to distrust, because prevention is the best medicine [...] We never learned to love." Here, generational self-diagnosis and self-definition are one and the same.

Yet Silva's political energy counteracts any trace of self-pity. Of the Iraq War, Silva writes, "Our caretakers sold their freedom for a reassurance that never came." Silva's caustic wit, too, mitigates any sense of disappointment and betrayal. "We grew awkwardly into our bodies, debating over conflicting sexual instruction. Does it mean nothing or everything?" she quips. And while the piece may condemn audience members for their sins, it also delights, offering a bravura performance thrilling in its scope and ambition. In the end, however, the defiant tone takes a turn toward lament. "We have inherited all of the broken pieces of this world," mourns the narrator. We can only hope this fiery manifesto lights the way toward reparation.

painting the carpet

daniel c. smith

Characters:

Annabelle—hitwoman; 29 years old

Floyd—“cleaner” and friend of Annabelle; 45-55 years old

Dex—hitman; 21 years old

Roger—Annabelle’s grandfather; 80-90 years old

Scene 1. Lights come up on the inside of a kitchen. It is early morning. Directly center stage is a table, upon which are two coffee mugs, a bowl of fruit, an ornate box, and an open newspaper. There is a chair pulled up to one side. On the other side however, Roger, an elderly man, lies dead on the floor. He appears to have fallen backwards in the chair after being shot in the forehead. His face is turned upstage and his limbs are sprawled out. This tableau sits on the stage for some time, and then Annabelle enters. She is a refreshingly beautiful woman and emits a calm intensity. Her hair is up; she is perhaps even wearing a hat. She wears a suit as well as an overcoat. She walks in hesitantly, as though worried that someone will see her. She doesn’t glance at the dead man, but instead notices the two coffee mugs. She stops still and listens hard. Slowly, she draws her gun. It is a pistol, jet black, with a silencer on the end.

Annabelle: (*calling out*) Hello? (*No answer.*) Is anyone there? (*Still nothing.*)

She quietly goes offstage towards the bedrooms. After a few seconds she reenters, putting her gun away. She walks to the table. She still has not glanced at the body, but instead picks up the newspaper nonchalantly and begins to read. After a bit, she sets it back down. She eyes the mug on the opposite end of the table from the newspaper and hesitantly picks it up. She looks inside, then holds it up to her nose and sniffs it. She sets it back down. When she does so, she notices the ornate box. For the first time, she briefly glances down at the body, and then opens the box. She pulls out a long, beautiful necklace with a small star on the end. She holds it out before her and stares at it for a very long time. Suddenly—as sudden to her as it is to us—she stuffs it into her coat pocket. She closes the box and sets it back where it had been. She walks to Roger’s body and crouches near his head. She says nothing; she merely stares at Roger emotionlessly for a long while.

As she crouches near Roger, Floyd walks in. Floyd is a gruff man with terse, dry humor.

Floyd: Annabelle, you know the dead can’t speak.

She looks up suddenly. She hadn’t noticed he was in the room. She stands and straightens up.

Annabelle: I’d forgotten. I was trying to ask him who the second coffee mug belonged to.

Floyd: (*noticing it*) Oh, shit. We have a witness? Did you see anyone leaving as you came in?

Annabelle: If I did they'd be dead by now. What, do you think this is my first day?

Floyd: Maybe he made himself two. He's probably senile. (*walks stage right and looks briefly into the bedrooms*) Maybe Dex decided to go on a date with him before he wasted him. (*Annabelle chuckles at this. Floyd returns to center stage.*) What do you guys know about the fella who called this hit, anyway?

Annabelle: Nothing. Secretive type.

Floyd: Well, that's just great. God, it's too early for this shit.

Annabelle: (*glancing at her watch*) I've gotta go. Good luck, Floyd.

Floyd: Call Dex and tell him to get his ass back down here right now. I do not like loose ends.

Annabelle: I'm sure he's not too far. This is his first job solo; he's probably crying in that Starbucks around the corner. (*She exits*)

Floyd: (*calling after her*) You didn't touch anything, did you?

Annabelle: (*offstage*) Not much!

Floyd sighs heavily. He looks around the room cursorily and then gets out a pair of rubber gloves. The lights dim as he slips them on.

Music. The stagehands/other actors come onstage to set up for Annabelle's home.

Scene 2 takes place around midnight several days later. Downstage right is a couch with a short table before it. There is also a table upstage but off-center slightly. It is apparent that a card game has just ended at the table, as there are various scattered cards and multiple bottles of alcohol. Lights come to full. At one end of the table, Annabelle stands over Dex. She is bending him over the table so much that his cheek is being flattened on it. She has two fingers pointed at the back of his head, like an imaginary gun. She is telling him a story, in her own way. Throughout the following monologue, Annabelle portrays both a stylized parody of herself and also the character 'Fatso.' She speaks quickly. She performs this speech with frightening conviction in voice, tonality, and emotion. She enjoys the theatricality of it all. Dex says nothing throughout this save for a few grunts, perhaps, and reacts very little. Annabelle has done this before and he's learned to simply wait until she's calmed back down. Floyd is sitting across from them, watching while drinking a beer. Floyd is quite comfortably drunk. He is enjoying Annabelle's performance, even though he knows this story well.

Annabelle: And then you know what this fat fucker tells me? He goes "I've got children! Please don't do this to me! Please!" He's cryin' now, he's got snot coming out of his nose—enormous nose on this guy—and then he says "What will happen to my daughters? They won't have anyone. Please!" Now, I can't stand the ones that whine. Just accept that you're going to die, you know? And that's exactly what I tell him. "Shut up. Just shut the hell up!" (*She gets a bit more forceful with Dex, using her free hand to slam him down on the table a bit.*) "Now, listen. You see Mr. Pistol here? He doesn't give one single fuck about you. Not one. Not about your daughters, or your life, and definitely not about your three-hundred and eighty pounds of pathetic. I've tried negotiating with him in the past, really I have, but unfortunately he doesn't budge." Then I press the

gun into his temple (*she does so*) and I wait. He's sobbing hard now. He's trying to hide it, but he's got that near-silent whimper thing going on, you know? Like a goddamn puppy. I break the tension. "But you know what, Fatso? I care. I'm not evil. And I think your daughters deserve to have a father figure, I really do. I'm gonna make you a deal. My associate here, Floyd, is gonna recite to you a list of words that we pulled together for just this occasion. The category is 'Things That Can Kill You.' He'll read this list once and only once, and all you have to do is repeat the entire list back to him, in order, and then I let you go. But if you mess up, even a little bit, Mr. Pistol won't be very happy. Deal?" He thinks about it for a few seconds, and then nods slowly, like he's not sure, but he's like what other choice does he have, you know?

Dex: (*half-muffled from his face being on the table*) I...don't get it.

Floyd: What don't you get?

Dex: What was the point of the list?

Floyd: There was no point. (*He leans forward*) Listen , kid, here's what you don't get yet: some people are really fun to fuck with. They just are. Now you have to be a little careful, you've definitely gotta know your victim. Some people flip their shit when they're messed with. They fight back. They catch you off guard for a second, and the next thing you know, you're lying dead on a kitchen floor and they're the neighborhood hero. (*he scoffs*) Complete with a Lifetime movie and a key to the goddamn city...

Annabelle: He's talking about our former associate, Sandcastle. He was immortalized in film for pissing himself while an old woman

smashed his face in with a blender. She became some sort of hero. Until Floyd and I finished her a week later.

Floyd: What a fuckload of ass that movie was. I mean, Sandcastle was a vagina, that part was accurate. But the rest of it was just garbage.

Annabelle: Back to the issue at hand...

Floyd: The point of the list was there was no point. It was fun.

Annabelle: The point was that he recited the whole damn thing right and I killed him anyway. (*Fires her 'gun' at Dex's temple*) Bang. Painted the carpet with his brains.

Annabelle finally lets Dex go, to his great pleasure. He sits back at the table with a sigh of relief. Annabelle grabs her glass of brandy and wanders about the room humming to herself. Dex watches her.

Floyd:(*to Dex*) You should be honored you're shadowing one of the best contract killers I've ever had the pleasure of knowing. She's done better work at her age than most ever achieve. (*He finishes his beer and stretches. Annabelle is now staring distantly out the window.*) Well, I won't be able to sleep if I get any more sober. Besides, it sounds like it's finally stopped raining. (*Floyd stands and begins to walk towards the door. He pats Dex's shoulder as he passes him.*) You did okay this week, kid.

Dex: Thanks, Floyd.

Floyd: Technique could still use some work. (*To Annabelle*) I assume the kid's told you all about his handiwork earlier this week?

Annabelle: No, we hadn't discussed it yet, but I gleaned a bit from the aftermath. Dead, possibly sleeping old man, two coffee mugs, witness on the loose?

Floyd: Ha! No, no witnesses. He'll tell you all about it. When are you getting out of here anyway, Dex?

Dex: My girl gets pissed when I come home drunk. I think I'll just stay here and sober up a bit, *(to Annabelle)* if that's fine with...

Annabelle: Why not? You can clean. *(To Floyd)* Good night, Floyd.

Floyd: *(as he exits)* Remember kid, you've gotta make it more fun for yourself. You don't ever want to get to the point where you realize you're killing people.

Dex: *(smiling)* Thanks.

Floyd: *(He exits, and then yells from offstage)* Good night!

There is an awkward pause. Annabelle is staring towards the door while Dex stares dumbly at her.

Annabelle: Floyd drives better when he's had a few.

Dex: I don't really have to clean, do I?

Annabelle: *(ambiguously)* We'll see. First things first. *(She walks to the couch and sits.)* Tell me all about your first day without training wheels.

Dex: *(unsure of whether to follow her to the couch or stay put)* It's not as funny as Floyd made it seem. I...I did kill him. *(He has decided to awkwardly sit on the front edge of his chair.)*

Annabelle: I noticed.

Dex: It's more that I...sort of...I had breakfast with him before I did it.

Annabelle: Just plain old breakfast?

Dex: Well, tea.

Silence.

Annabelle: Have I really been that poor of a mentor to you? I've tried—

Dex: *(sighing)* Here we go.

Annabelle: —being patient with you, and taking you through it all step by step, but you never cease to blow me away with just how... nice you are. By the time I was your age, I had at least a dozen stories like the one tonight. But you... You're too merciful. How do you think shit like this makes me look?

Dex: ...Do you really want me to answer that? *(Annabelle nods)* I think it makes you look...weak.

Annabelle: It makes me look like I'm bad at what I do. Do you want people to think I'm bad at what I do? *(Dex doesn't answer.)*

Annabelle eyes him coolly.) Take those bottles into the kitchen.

Dex looks at her incredulously. He wants to say no, but soon gives in and obeys. He grabs the beer bottles off the table and exits to the kitchen. Annabelle stands. She seems pleased with herself. She stretches herself out delicately. She slowly reaches up to her hairpin and removes it, letting her hair fall down beautifully. She sets it down next to her glass of brandy. She walks around, taking in the room. She pauses for a moment, reaches into her shirt, and takes out the starred-necklace, which she has apparently been wearing all night. She studies it for a few seconds then lets it fall. She calmly stares out the window. Dex reenters.

Dex: *(as he enters; curtly)* Have you even sorted your recycling once since you've lived here?

Annabelle: Is that what that's for? I thought they were just giving me more trash cans.

Dex: It doesn't matter. I've cleared it up for you. You're welcome.

He flashes her a decidedly cordial smile and walks briskly to his chair, removing his jacket from it and slipping it on in one quick motion.

Annabelle: Hey, hold on a second Speedy Gonzales, what's the big rush? Did you sober up that fast?

Dex: I drive fine.

Annabelle: I'm talking about your girlfriend. *(Dex stops still.)* You said she doesn't like you coming home drunk.

Dex: *(realizing that he's been caught)* I'm not...staying there right now.

Annabelle: *(sincere)* She kicked you out? *(Dex nods.)*

Dex: I confessed that I've been...you know. Getting some strange.

Silence.

Annabelle: I'm not that strange, am I?

A warm smile breaks out over Dex's face.

Dex: No. You're not. *(Dex walks to her, but hesitates for a moment to make sure she's ok with it. She raises her eyebrows expectantly. Dex then kisses her passionately, intensely. He speaks afterwards, very closely and intimately, his hands around her waist.)* I thought you didn't want to do that tonight.

Annabelle: What gave you that idea?

Dex: You rode me pretty hard just now.

Annabelle: *(taking off his jacket)* Work is work. Sex is...something different. Something better. Good answer?

Dex: Not really.

Annabelle tosses his jacket aside.

Annabelle: No? Well, maybe this will do.

She kisses him hard now and he returns in kind. This lasts a short while as they kiss and grope each other. As it continues, Annabelle steers Dex toward the couch and throws him down on it. She immediately follows by getting on top of him. Straddling him, she bends down and kisses him again. While their kiss grows in intensity, Dex's hands slide slowly down Annabelle's back until they are resting on her butt.

Annabelle: *(sitting up slightly, now on all fours)* You're getting better. *(She smiles at him.)*

Annabelle's necklace is now hovering inches above Dex's chest. Not having noticed it until this moment, he is now transfixed on the star floating lightly. He grabs the necklace, and as he stares at it, his jaw drops slowly.

Dex: *(Before he has the chance to stop them, the words seep out)* I knew it.

Annabelle: What? What's wrong?

He looks up at her.

Dex: It was you.

Annabelle: What the hell are you talking about?

Dex: You're the granddaughter.

Annabelle stares at him confusedly for a few seconds, and then it sinks in. The change on her face is instant and drastic. What was once playful puzzlement has transformed into a deep and utter sense of disbelief. Her

jaw is tight, and her eyes are fixed on some point beyond the room. She lethargically climbs off of Dex and stands. She walks to the table, her back to the couch. She speaks, though more to the room than to Dex.

Annabelle: Get out.

Dex: Why didn't you tell me?

Annabelle: Get out.

Dex: *(standing)* Answer me! *(she says nothing)* Annabelle!

Annabelle: *(turning to face him for the first time since she stood)* Don't you have a hotel room to get home to?

Dex: You knew it was him. You saw the body. You must've known the house. Don't make this about me.

Annabelle: This isn't about anything. Get out.

Dex: No. We're talking about this.

Dex walks to the table and sits. Annabelle stares at him, taken aback by his forcefulness. He motions for her to sit. Very reluctantly, she does.

Annabelle: My grandfather does not speak about the family. Not to anyone. How did you know about the necklace?

Dex: He showed me. I don't know why he opened up to me, but he did.

Annabelle: I don't believe you. (*micro beat*) He doesn't open up...it's not something he does. (*accusatory*) How did you get him to talk?

Dex: (*after a sigh*) You want the whole story? (*She doesn't stir*) Fine. I got there at seven-thirty exactly. I was posing as a census taker, as you suggested. When he came to the door, he looked...kind of... happy to see me, in a way. I can't really explain it. I told him who I was – fake name and all – and I was preparing to ask if I could come inside when he invited me in. I believe his exact phrasing was, "You look like you could use some breakfast." And then he just walked away and into the kitchen. It was strange. He had a kindly air about him. He didn't ask if I was hungry, or even beckon me inside. He just walked into the kitchen fully expecting me to follow.

Annabelle: Why didn't you do it then?

Dex: I don't know. I think part of me wanted to figure out what he wanted with me; why he was being so inviting. I never actually found out, but he told me...everything. He showed me that necklace. He talked about your family. He talked a lot about –

Annabelle: My parents?

Dex: You. He...god, he really loved you, Annabelle. (*Annabelle doesn't respond.*) I'm sorry...that I did it. If I would've known...

Annabelle: Then you would have done it anyway. (*Dex isn't sure what to say.*) If you would've known he was my grandfather, tell me you would've done it anyway. (*Still no answer.*) Tell me!

Dex: Well, what do you want me to say? No, I wouldn't have. I

wouldn't have been able to do that to you.

Annabelle sighs heavily with disappointment.

Annabelle: Dex, I ordered the hit.

Any remaining sliver of hope or goodwill instantaneously drains from Dex's face. He works his mouth as though he wants to speak, but he can't find any words.

Annabelle: I don't know what my grandfather did or didn't say about this, but he's not well. Pancreatic cancer. Terminal. (*short silence*) I'm the only person he's told. He doesn't speak to anyone in the family anymore, except for me, if you can call it conversing. He's had me pick up his groceries every month for the past three years. Of course that doesn't at all mean he talks to me, except maybe to say that it's supposed to rain tomorrow. Or that I forgot his pudding. But then, last month, he told me about his cancer. He said that without treatment, he had no idea how much longer he had. He didn't stick around at the doctor's office long enough to find out.

There is a silence. Annabelle is now staring distantly around the room, as Dex stares down at the table, deep in thought.

Dex: But...was that necessary?

Annabelle: My Papa loved life. And there's no way he'd spend the rest of it in a hospital bed. Even if living life only meant being able to take shits in his own toilet, he wasn't planning on dying unless he was living it to the fullest. Say what you want, but I gave him peace.

I couldn't do it directly, but my intentions were there.

Dex: Why did it have to be me?

Annabelle: It just did, okay? *(pause)* Any more questions?

Dex: Just one. Why didn't you tell me about all of this after I did it?

Annabelle: You didn't need to know.

Dex: That's not true. *(He stands.)* Annabelle, I don't know what you think of me, but I'm a great listener. You can talk to me, really. I care about you. I...I don't see what's stopping us from –

Annabelle: Don't do this to me, Dex. Don't ruin the fun.

Dex: I can't pretend anymore. I can't do it. I like you a lot more than just hooking up a few times a week.

Annabelle: *(realizing)* ...She didn't kick you out. You left her.

Dex: For you.

Silence. She stares at him, still sitting, while he stands, staring her right back. Finally, Annabelle speaks.

Annabelle: I think you should go.

Dex: Annabelle...

Annabelle: *(with finality)* No, Dex.

Dex doesn't know how to react. He is shaken to the core.

Dex: *(feigning indifference)* Don't worry about it. I got carried away, that's all. Good night. *(He walks shamefully to the door.)*

Annabelle: Dex, I wanted you to do it for a reason. *(He stops but doesn't turn to face her.)* He was my Papa, you know? And as much as he didn't respect me, for some reason I respected him. And I couldn't let him go down without dignity. Most of the people in our line of work would've stripped him of that, first thing. But I knew you wouldn't fuck with him. I knew you'd understand what I wanted you to do even if you didn't realize it. I'm sorry I yelled at you earlier. Merciful is good, sometimes. Just don't make it a habit.

Dex lets this sink in for a moment.

Dex: *(still facing the door)* Someday...will you tell me about your parents?

Annabelle: Maybe.

Dex: Ok. Good night. *(He exits.)*

Annabelle sits alone in her living room, listening to the silence. After a long while, she stands. She takes the necklace in her hand and looks at it for a moment. Then, very slowly, she takes it off. The lights dim as she does so.

Annabelle sets the necklace delicately on the table. Slightly somber music plays. The stagehands come out and set up for Roger's house, shifting the table slightly and striking the couch.

Scene 3 takes place the same morning as Scene 1, but about twenty minutes prior. Once the scene change ends, Roger and Dex enter and sit at the table across from one another. Lights come up to full.

Roger: *(re: the necklace)* She loved stars. When she was a child, all she wanted to do was be an astronomer. I got her as many telescopes as I could just to keep her happy. Yep, my Jacqueline was full of childlike wonder, more than most kids, I like to think. *(Brief pause.)* Astronomy. Nothin' ever came of it, of course, and by the time she was in college it wasn't even in her sights anymore. *(proudly)* But, I got her that necklace on when she turned eighteen. I guess to remind her that she was and always will be my little girl. *(He leans back in his chair and sips his tea.)* Mmm, this tea is perfect.

Dex: It's very good tea. Thank you again, sir.

Roger: Please, call me Roger. *(Dex nods in affirmation.)*

Dex: If I may ask, Roger, what happened to Jacqueline?

Roger: ...That there's a grim story, son. I don't suppose you can blame an old man for wanting to forget, can you?

Dex: That's fine, Roger. It really wasn't my place to ask anyhow.

Roger: The abridged version is that Jacqueline's dead. Her and her husband both. Left their daughter alone in the world at seventeen years old... I'll never be able to stop blaming Jackie for that. *(Brief pause while Roger stares up at the ceiling.)* I've already talked whirlwinds about my granddaughter this morning, I know. You're not fed up hearing about her, are you? *(Dex shakes his head.)* Well,

as you can probably tell, Belle is a great girl, always has been. She always had a strong bond with me. I don't know what she thinks of me now. I'd like to say that she doesn't hate me, but I don't know for sure. On that day, when her parents passed, something inside her changed. She became self-destructive. I don't think she's ever trusted anyone since. She'll never say it outright, but I can tell that she blames them more than she mourns them. I try to tell her that that's not the right way to remember them, but I don't think I'll ever get through to her. *(gesturing to the necklace)* Jacqueline was going to give her this necklace for her eighteenth birthday, but after she died, that responsibility fell to me. *(He sighs.)*

Dex: Why didn't Belle take it?

Roger: *(placing the necklace back into its box)* Oh, she definitely wanted it. Still does. And I still won't give it to her. I told her that she'll get it once she truly understands loss. Until then, I can't say that she deserves it.

Dex: Sounds fair.

Roger: Besides, I've hardly talked to her since. I only have a vague idea of what she keeps herself up to. As far as I know, she's embraced all the negative parts of living, and to the fullest. Alcohol. Hard drugs, soft drugs, gateway drugs, prescription drugs. More men than she can handle. She doesn't understand that love can be more than a few minutes on a mattress. Once I tried to talk to her about love, and she asked me what I think it is. I told her: "Sex is sex. Love is...something different. Something better." Good answer?

Dex: Not really.

Roger: (*melancholically*) I didn't think so either. (*He sips his tea and glances out the window.*) Well, it's about time for you to get going isn't it? I don't want to back up your whole day.

Dex: (*checks his watch*) Yeah, it'll be eight o'clock soon.

Roger: Thanks for listening, son. An old man gets lonely talking to himself all the time.

Dex: Thank you for the tea, it really was fantastic.

Roger: (*looking out the window again*) It's supposed to rain tomorrow.

Dex: Good to know, Roger.

Tableau. Both men are still seated, Roger staring out the window and Dex staring at him.

The lights fade as Dex reaches into the inside of his coat.

End of play.





light / henry babbitt-cook

smoky visions of goodbye

perry buto

It is not his day – for that matter, it is not his year – but then, when has it ever been his anything? “It ain’t fair.” A puff of grey smoke twines past his lips in a hurry. “It ain’t ever fair. Life. ain’t. fair.” He closes his eyes and strains his ears for the sound of his mother’s honeysuckle voice caressing his thoughts.

“Stop smoking, Elias, my silly little boy,” she always croons at him, “Stop smoking!”

Elias opens his empty eyes and lifts the cigarette back to his lips, taking another long drag of the tar flavored cancer stick cradled between his fore finger and thumb. Sometimes he contemplates quitting, but then he’d never be able to hear her call to him again. Even if smoking kills him, he cannot think of anyone who would mind; his brother wants him dead anyway, and his father drank himself to death not too long after his mother passed.

A dog barks in the distance. Elias wonders what color the dog is. “Brown is a common color for dogs,” he contemplates absently, “perhaps white.” He wonders what color the world is. His thoughts darken as his mind meanders toward his brother. Against his will, Elias’ subconscious supplies him with the name that he has

promised himself he would forget: “Sal”

Bitterly, Elias grinds his teeth around his cigarette and spits it out, listening intently for where it lands, smothering it with the toe of his heavy boot the moment it meets the concrete. He is aware of the honking horns in the street and the wary stares of onlookers passing him not needing his eyes to feel their heated glares. He wasn't born blind, but he's glad he is now. Elias enjoys the comforting silence that the lack of visual stimuli leaves. The cool cinder block supporting him stays firm, holding him place; it is unyielding no matter how hard Elias pushes against it. Sighing breathlessly, he can feel the cold bite of his own breath across his nose as it condenses in the frigid air, and he retreats deeper into the welcoming wool of his grey coat, shivering slightly.

Elias wonders where his brother went after their fight. “I HATE YOU!” The younger boy had screamed at Elias, flecks of burning saliva scalding pieces of his face like acid. “You killed her with your goddamn second-hand smoke!! You happy now!?” Even though both boys knew that it was an unreasonable accusation – their mother had smoked a pack a day for twelve years – it was no doubt something that they would choose to believe, and a burden that Elias let dictate his life ever since. It was for their mother's memory that he smoked. He never quite enjoyed the taste, the method, or any other part of smoking, but it did get her attention focused on him; it was how they bonded. For the most part, the two of them spending time together resulted in violent fights. But she always managed to talk to him with a civil, even friendly, tone when she caught him with a cigarette between his fingers and a glass of whisky resting in his palm.

“Such a naughty boy, taking on vices at such a young age. You get that from me though. Now pour me a glass of the good stuff, and let me tell you about when I was your age!”

But she'd stopped drinking many years back, so he would pour her a sugary glass of Dr. Pepper. Her half-delirious odysseys would always stick with Elias, but he knew that Sal would never forgive Elias for “stealing” time with their mother away from the greedy younger boy.

Elias sighs and listens pensively to the clock on the top of the building he is standing under chime ten. It is too late for him to be outside in this overcrowded neighborhood. Grabbing his maple wood cane, Elias saunters off, vowing silently to himself that today will be the day he stops smoking. Today will be the day he looks for Sal. Today will be the day that he is reconciled with family. Today will be the day – “Aw, screw it. I'll probably never stop.”

Face serene, Elias walks down the street without opening his eyes, dragging his cane on the ground and relying on only the echoing kerfuffle of the crowd to tell him his place amongst the throng. His smooth tanned hands are shoved roughly in his pockets, and he stands proudly, refusing to apologize to the few people he bumps in to. He listens especially for familiar sounds, strains his ears for the sound of his brother's cries.

“Where are you?” He whispers to the gum-stained sidewalks.

“Come home soon.” He begs to the oil-pocked streets.



untitled

joseph ward

There lie the scrawlings of a dead man
a man as cold as stone
a cross of gold laid in his hand
a heap of flesh and bone
the spirit of life has left him
his eyes will gleam no more
gone to be a seraphim
on heaven's golden shore.
The voice of God is booming
as he walks up to the gates
the angels are all swooning
as He talks of the world's fate.
Immortality was his earthly prize,
now fear and panic drown his eyes.

this is a title

aiden hercules

Kinda hard to be a rolling stone these days
Path's set out before you begin the maze
Try to chart and coordinate a different course
They rope and break you like a wild horse
Back is broke and bones are tired
From hauling logs to plato's cave to fuel the fire
Eyes are empty and throat is sore
Got nothing left inside to attempt a rebel's roar



untitled / erin fremder

stockholm syndrome

ava williams

Riveting,
I mean, star-splicing –
your words abducted
my all.
Spitting fragments
of light,
shattered across irises –

I'm blinded and
don't mind.

They say that you're a criminal –
It's nothing.
I like my brain burned
And my life liminal.



woodfire vase / jonathan steele

a hinged heart

marissa litak



Guilt. She should leave; she didn't really need any of this. The door opened, causing a little bell to tinkle happily. A breath of cool air brushed the back of her neck; goosebumps rose along her skin and she wrapped her sweater tighter around herself.

The smell of boxed-away things, lemon-scented furniture polish, and discoveries yet to be made drifted between all the quaint lamps and tables and oddities. She saw herself afloat in a sea of remnants from years gone by, which suddenly expanded into immensity. Blinking, her eyes refocused on a white armoire painted with little rosebuds of pink and yellow. The pale green color of the stems reminded her of the soft new growth on Douglas Fir trees in the early spring. She always used to tear them from the tree, pinching off their infant life.

She should leave, no point in tempting herself to buy things she didn't need. Elaine turned to walk back out into the blustery February day, debating if there was still time to stop by the deli a few doors down. This was her lunch break, after all, but if she stopped there she may not have time to walk the three and a half blocks back to her office building before the meeting started.

But as she passed the counter, she saw it. It drew her eye like North draws a compass. She leaned over the counter to get a better look, peering through the glass.

explosive mind / cleo maul

“Would you like a closer look at something?” the cheerful voice of the saleswoman asked.

Elaine nodded mutely and pointed, then cleared her throat and said roughly, “That necklace, please.”

“This one here? Okie dokie, here you are!” The saleswoman laid it out on the counter.

It wasn’t spectacular, certainly not the most beautiful piece of jewelry in the shop. Silver glinted from beneath the tarnish. It was a large, round locket with a vine etched around the edge and initials inscribed in the center. She extended a trembling hand to touch it, reaching slowly at first and then speeding up the closer she got. It was like a magnet, the pull increasing as the proximity did. When her fingers touched the cool metal she felt a strange sense of release in her chest. Bringing the locket near her face, she examined the inscription. MJB, it read, in flowing script. She delicately pried the locket open, and then her breath stopped.

There was a picture, an old black-and-white photograph. Two people were depicted: a young woman of about twenty and a baby. The woman had dark hair that was pulled back and was gazing down at the child in her arms. The infant was looking back up at her with a very solemn expression, and reaching one pudgy arm toward the woman’s face. But it wasn’t the baby that enthralled Elaine; it was the mother. She had a slight smile on her face, and her large eyes were full of rapt adoration.

Walking out of the store with the locket securely boxed up and in her purse, she felt dazed, and was two blocks away before she realized she was going in the wrong direction.

“Paul, Jeremy,” Elaine called out, pouring the traffic-cone-orange cheese powder into the pot. “Dinner’s almost ready, go wash your hands.” Jeremy, the younger at age four, responded by running maniacally through the house, shrieking as loudly as a firetruck’s

siren. There was no response from Paul, though even if he had spoken, Jeremy’s racket would have smothered his voice.

Stirring the noodles, she exhaled quietly, as if too spent even to sigh. Her mother had always added sharp cheddar cheese, she remembered. The image of her mother’s strong, steady hand pressing the block firmly against the metal grater, pushing it down, then lifting it to the top to begin again came unbidden. It had been like magic, the way that she would suddenly lift up the grater and reveal a large pile of soft golden flakes where none had been before. Elaine was always allowed to eat the pieces still clinging to the interior of the grater, and took a few delicious pinches from the pile itself when her mother’s back was turned. For some reason, those always tasted better. Elaine stared fixedly at the slight film of orange dust on the sides of the pot, realizing that she never made macaroni with real cheese.

Jeremy’s screaming suddenly pierced her skull like the sharp jab of a spear.

“Jeremy, that’s enough!” she shouted. Taking a deep breath, she continued, “Dinner’s ready. Now get in the kitchen.” Elaine mechanically separated the macaroni into three bowls, with the smallest one for Jeremy. It was still far more than he could eat; she had made too much again.

When everyone was settled at the table with their bowls in front of them, Elaine looked around. Paul was intently shoveling his food down as quickly as possible, and Jeremy was starting to wail, tears coursing down his chubby, cheese-coated face. Elaine directed her eyes to her own bowl of fake orange cheese and breathed her almost-sigh, her shoulders seeming to crumple beneath its weight.

Later, alone in her too big, too empty room at last, Elaine took the box out of her purse. She removed the lid and overturned the box onto the flowered bedspread, causing the locket to spill out.

And there it lay, shimmering softly in the muted light from the bedside lamp. She sank slowly to her knees, resting her forearms on the mattress in front of her. Elaine hesitantly picked up the locket and held it face-up in her palm. The light was reflected in her hungry eyes as she studied the inscription. MJB... if only she knew what it meant, who it was! Elaine opened the locket, and there the woman and child were, forever emanating the black-and-white perfection of their love. Elaine stared at the woman's averted eyes, wondering. Maybe she had been a housewife, happily married and settled in a house with blue trim. This was their first child, carefully laid to rest in a plain wooden crib at night. She and her husband wanted more children, wanted to fill the house with them.

Or maybe they were content with one and lived in a flat in a city somewhere. She would carry the baby with her on the weekly grocery expedition, and would always return with flowers to put in a vase on the kitchen table. Daisies were her favorite.

Or she might have been single, the man in her life having deserted her. But she retained her inherently bright outlook, and sang lullabies while cradling her baby, sitting in an old rocking chair as the first stars came out.

Whoever she had been, Elaine was convinced that she would have always cooked with real cheese.

Elaine bowed her head, clasping her hands around the locket in front of her. She remained kneeling at the side of her bed, surrounded by a pool of light. The house was otherwise dark and quiet, the only sign of life the nearly inaudible breathing of her two sons sleeping down the hall.



it pours.

rowan carrick

And the gutters pound
And the streets lie down
Under that
Finger-tappin'
Djembe slappin'
Belly pattin' rhythm

And the worms come out
And the children shout
At that
Puddle splashin'
Symbol crashin'
Violent passion rhythm

The night sky, grey with cloud cover
Lays with her lover, Milky Way, straight above her
In a million pieces, smashed

While the puddles, splashed
Swallow up the paths
That we take on our way back

That beat is never overplayed
It drums on the window you pull up the shade
Trace patterns on the glass
For an hour and a half

But it's tired now
Like a choir at an early morning mass

Your fingers, inspired
On the palm of my hand
Keeping those same beats
Wrapped up in these sheets
Tappin' out the rhythm of the rain on the streets



crabapple pie

casey oakes

The lawn is flecked with over-ripe,
festered apples. In an ebon cavern of mush
a worm thrives, feasting in delight. We choose
only the crisp and firm, which have
fallen amongst the fecund vegetation.
My mother's fingers pluck them from their
earthly resting place, sparing only those that
hang from crusted branches.
The dirt on her fingers is moist and fertile.

That bitter taste awakens my senses, stinging
into cheek's fleshy walls, curdling saliva.
Taste buds are pollinated.
Boiling water and heat exposes flavors, revealing
hidden sweetness.
Sugar and pastry crust become an unsuccessful
guise for the fruit's tart essence.

Copious baths of vanilla ice cream
mask our failure. The smell is sweet, the taste
incongruent. Nature's confection
offers a cryptic perfection.
Artificiality desired only
by those with languid tongues.

symptom

annie thomas

Crows watch and wait. Their patience is unsettling. She had always been fond of crows – she liked to sit out in the yard, cross-legged, barefoot, staring into the woods at the edge of our property. Staring and waiting. They always came eventually; first as rapid flutters of shadow between the trees, then emerging with raucous greeting. She never made a sound in reply. She just sat, and watched, and waited for them to come closer; and they always did.

That was in the days before her diagnosis; after, of course, she couldn't even go outside, much less sit in the cool grass as the sun dipped low and threw her shadow behind her like unfurled wings. In the first few months, I'd wheel her to the window so she could watch the clouds change and see the birds skip through the air with enviable spirit. The crows always came to watch her. They lined up on the tops of the trees one after another until as the days and months and symptoms compiled, I started believing that every breath stolen from my dying mother's lungs gave birth to a new crow. They multiplied as she waned, and I couldn't stand it. I tried to scatter them: I ran outside, flapping my arms, cawing in predatory imitation. But they just watched me, silent, and their gaze was an unspoken judgment.

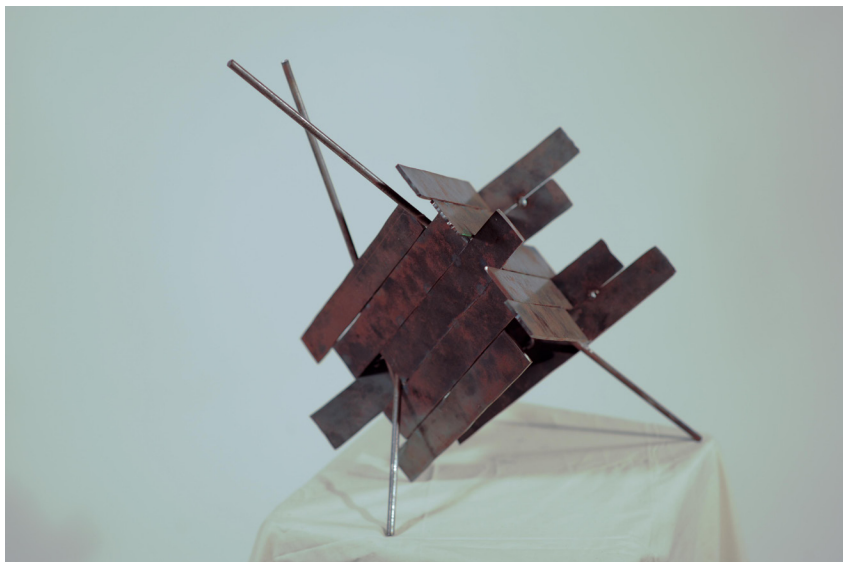
Every day the crows crept closer – or they ran out of room in the trees. I'd return from the doctor and find crows in the driveway,

open a cabinet and find feathers in the dishes. My mother wouldn't say a thing about them, and I learned to stop asking. The crows were waiting, and watching, and their patience was unsettling.

She told me a story once about a crow that kidnapped an infant and brought it home to its nest, to raise it in place of the young it had lost. It unnerved me, the thought of being raised as a bird – secluded in a tiny, fragile nest, with only a thin shell of woven branches between you and the height of your tree and the predators lurking on every branch below. But I think my mother wished for it more every day; I could see something in her eyes that I couldn't quite decipher, some kind of homesickness for a life she never had. Instead, she had me – and a different kind of sickness.

Her last day brought more crows than I thought could possibly exist. They filled the yard, lined up in neat rows, facing the house in an eerie display of what I could only describe as loyalty. They watched, and waited. My mother's lungs rattled, her last breaths fluttering against their cage in search of escape. I wheeled her out onto the porch so she could give her crows a last goodbye, so that maybe she could at least leave knowing that they had been her most patient visitors. The sun was low, and our shadows stretched out behind us, two long feathers. As if responding to a signal, the crows suddenly leapt into the air in an enormous wave. They swept up to the porch in a silent typhoon and surrounded my mother. I was pushed back by a wall of feathers and beaks and darkness. The wave became a whirlpool, and the whirlpool became a hurricane, and in an instant – they had vanished. The crows were gone, and my mother with them.

They never returned, but the hope of possibility refuses to dislodge itself from my heart. I'll wait forever for my mother and her crows, because it's too lonely here without them. I keep a sharp lookout. I watch, and I wait, and their absence is unsettling.



untitled / david oksner

testimony

jordan cox

The inquiry rendered her larynx immobile
A top the faux-pillars of law
As the demon's champion demanded a name

With his crooked claw staggering out
He claimed no trickery.

Just
One.

Couldn't he ask about the adorable flowered dress
Or the way it bloomed as she twirled?

Maybe he should inquire about her long spiral tresses
And the alien smell of hairspray
Applied solely for this day.

Instead he tried to extract the memories
Of rough skin on soft knees
Prying
For the bud behind Disney themed underthings

And the intruding tongue in a mouth
Of baby teeth.

The devil's advocate wanted the title
Of the chimera in her nightmares,
But
The ribbon between her lips remained in knots
Of fear –

Double and triple tied as laces on her
playground shoes.

Lucifer himself watched behind oak
As long as she remained silent –
Petrified by his gaze,
He would walk free.

He walked free.



wrong place at the wrong time

renee meschi

The shimmering shape of the man beckons on the other side of the water's surface. It is broken and dappled by rays of sun that slice through the image, causing it to pulse, disintegrating with every ripple. It reassociates at the apex of each pulse, only to fall apart again. She stops to look for a brief moment, but suddenly is snagged and hoisted into the air. Gasping, she is flipped onto the deck, struggling but utterly useless without buoyancy and current channels to cut through. A freezing, searing steel blade tickles her gill, then snaps her awareness closed like a switch.

She is splayed open, her sockeye-red indicative of a true krill diet. Not that farm-fed beta carotene rouge, cellular paint that helps us pretend that things are the way they were. If she weren't cut open, I would not even recognize her. Silver scales adorn so many others, and her wide eyes and gaping mouth are not features as we know them. Function without diversity of form, they carry but one blank expression.

She is motionless, soft and still dripping with wild waters. My own heart is neatly sliced and raw, wrapped in cellophane and marked down in price because there is such a glut this season. Clearish bloody fluid collects in the corners as it lies propped up on the

refrigerated shelves, and my burgundy red is just like everyone else's. Rows of hearts, and I can't even recognize myself. The best I can hope for is that I end up a dish served cold, and I do hope for this. In the meantime, I am cooking a very ordinary dinner. I distract myself by rotely massaging oils and herbs into her cold flesh. I don't even need to use a recipe anymore.

The filet lets out a loud hiss as it gives way to the heat of the pan, popping in protest. The bright red is slowly muted into a dull, greyish-pink as she submits to the scorching heat. I leave her raw in the middle, because that way the flesh is soft and flavorful.

And then a dismembering commences, a decomposition of big parts into little elements, of identities into bases and primers, where she melts osmotically, and I receive her. She disintegrates and reorganizes within me and we become the same.

I'll say, the way she was dancing by the surface, it's almost like she wanted it.



untitled

valentine hoy

Rocked to mire, bye, a lullaby, I sing swan songs too sleep, to sleep again, two sweet amends. Cock and Bul-let me in-2 am, air is thin and your eyes' beautiful blue hue freeze the dew, *à toi, pour toujours, adieu*. Swing back, swing forth, in the pendulum's metronome, all before your tomb came through the door in my room. Undo the back bow, go slow, till the dress meets the toe – meet Quivering embrace, say strength to my face in night's ostensible opus.

